

Office of Congressman Charles W. Dent
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Rep. Dent receives briefing on homeland security from regional emergency management agencies

STROUDSBURG — U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent (PA-15), a member of the House Homeland Security Committee, today attended a briefing given by the Northeast Pennsylvania Emergency Response Group Regional Counterterrorism Task Force (NEPAERG) to get first responders' input on how to spend homeland security dollars.

"Local emergency management authorities know where we need to spend money on homeland security," Congressman Dent said. "Because these groups are on the front line in the event of a calamity, their input is absolutely invaluable."

Emergency management personnel from eight different counties, including Lehigh and Northampton, comprise the NEPAERG. It is one of nine regional counter-terrorism task forces set up throughout the state. Its mission encompasses planning for an adequate municipal response to natural and man-made disasters.

During the two hour meeting the Congressman received input from state, local, and county authorities. One complaint echoed by many of the participants was a lack of flexibility in Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant regulations. One participant described, for example, how his organization was allowed to purchase various pieces of equipment with homeland security money but was not able to purchase a maintenance contract designed to keep that equipment operable.

Another problem voiced by local authorities is the need for more funding for the Emergency Management Performance Grant program, which is administered by DHS. Many local emergency management agencies are desperately short of equipment and personnel, one participant explained, and this program has traditionally been important in insuring the continued viability of these local offices.

“I always enjoy speaking with local authorities on homeland issues. In Washington, federal authorities often look at a problem from 60,000 feet. These local emergency management folks, by contrast, are right there on the ground and are thus face-to-face with the problems inherent in disaster response,” offered Dent.

After the meeting the Congressman had the opportunity to inspect some of the equipment maintained by NEPAERG. These items included various pieces of oxygen breathing apparatus, helmets, and decontamination gear.

Congressman Dent represents all or parts of Lehigh, Northampton, Montgomery and Berks counties.

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